

William Blount, the Southwest Territory,  
and Tennessee Statehood

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# William Blount, the Southwest Territory, and Tennessee Statehood

*Standards: 4.45, 8.39*

*Essential Question: What role did William Blount play in Tennessee statehood?*

**William Blount**, the eldest son of Jacob Blount, Sr., and Barbara Gray Blount, was born in Bertie County, North Carolina, on March 26, 1749. He was active in the family mercantile business and later served in the American Revolution as paymaster of the 3<sup>rd</sup> North Carolina regiment and for the state militia. Like many businessmen of his day, Blount believed the future of the new nation lay beyond the Appalachian Mountains so he accumulated as much western land as possible. He also served in various public offices throughout his life. In 1787, he was appointed as a North Carolina delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Blount did not actively participate in the convention, but he did attend the sessions and signed the new U.S. Constitution. It was during this time that Blount came to the attention of George Washington.

When North Carolina ceded its western lands to the federal government in 1789, Washington appointed Blount governor of the new territory. The **Territory South of the River Ohio** was commonly called the **Southwest Territory**, and comprised all of present-day Tennessee and stretched from the crest of the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. From Blount's perspective it was an ideal assignment. By this time he had acquired a million acres of western land, and it is likely that through partnerships he controlled much more. In fact Blount had already determined that he must move west in order to protect his vast holdings; his appointment as governor made the task easier.

Blount arrived in the territory in October 1790. He lived first in upper east Tennessee at Rocky Mount. One aspect of Blount's job as governor was to resolve disputes with the Cherokee. In June 1791, Blount called the Cherokee to a treaty at White's Fort on the Holston River, in present-day Knoxville. **The Treaty of the Holston**, signed in early July, called for additional Cherokee land cessions and set a new boundary. However, the Cherokee were unhappy because they believed Blount had treated them unfairly. Blount later built a home near the site of the treaty signing known as Blount Mansion.

Despite the successes of the treaty, militant Cherokees and Creeks continued to attack settlers who wanted protection from the army. Blount's superiors refused and Blount was left looking for a solution. Blount decided that the best solution was for Tennessee to become a state. Thousands of settlers had entered Tennessee through the **Cumberland Gap**. Because rivers were important as transportation routes, settlements had begun to spring up along the **Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers**. When a 1795 census revealed a population in excess of 60,000, large enough to satisfy the statehood

requirements of the Northwest Ordinance, Blount sent a delegate to Congress with instructions to ask for immediate admission. The delegate soon discovered that the Federalist-controlled Congress was certain that angry westerners would vote against the Federalist candidate in the upcoming presidential election. Therefore, Congress did not take any steps to admit Tennessee to statehood. To get around this obstacle, Blount decided to proceed without the blessing of Congress. Blount called for a constitutional convention and when the new document was approved, Blount simply declared that the new Tennessee state constitution was operational. On **June 1, 1796**, Tennessee was admitted to statehood. **John Sevier**, former governor of the State of Franklin was elected as Tennessee's first governor.

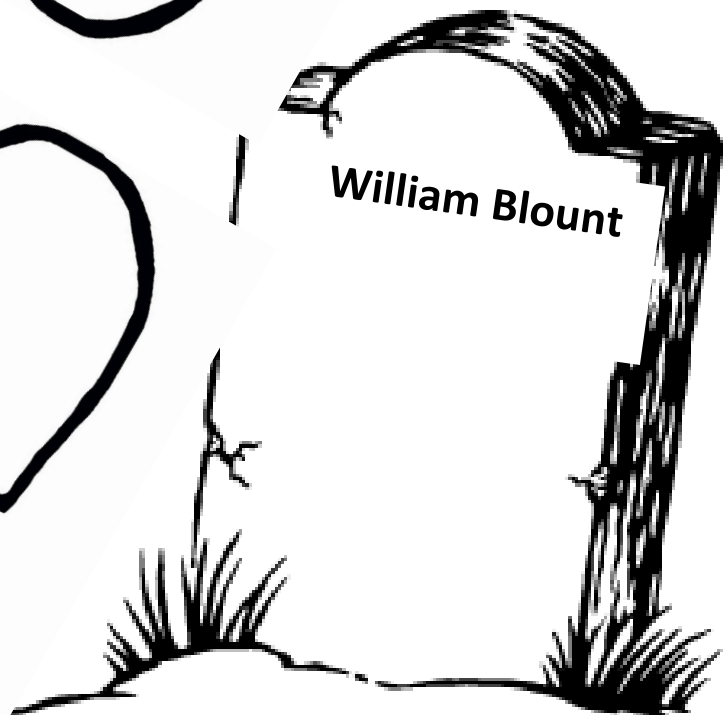
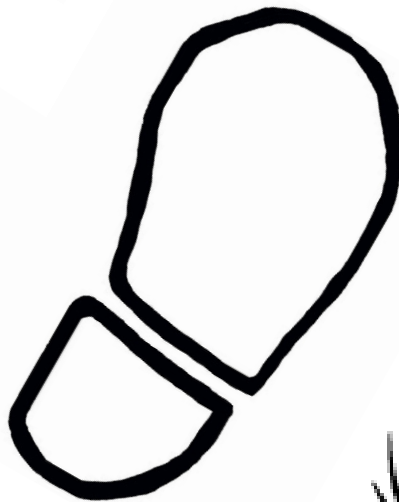
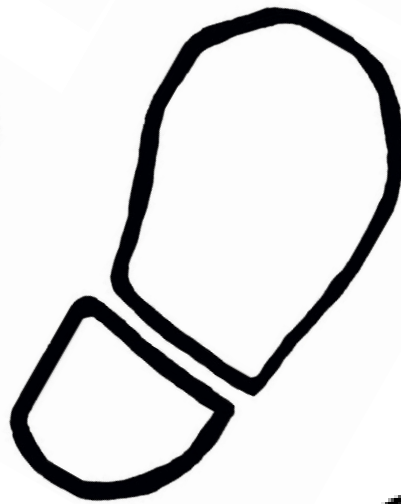
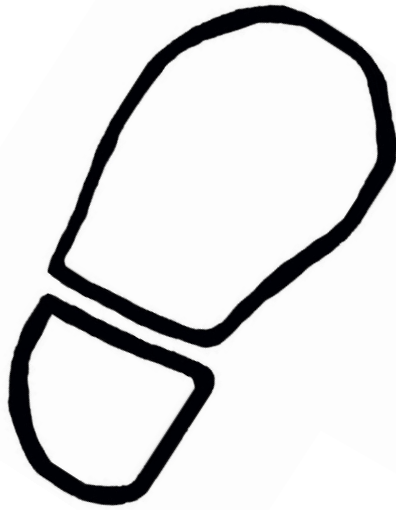
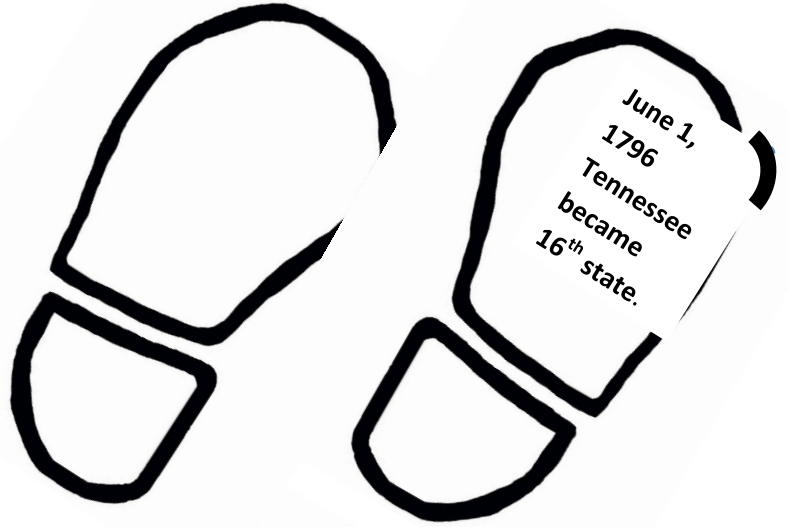
Blount held office as one of the first Senators from Tennessee. He hoped to use the position to manipulate land prices in the west in his favor. He was convinced that land values would rise if the British controlled the port of New Orleans, and so he arranged for Creek and Cherokee Indians to assist the British in capturing the city from the Spanish. Blount's plot was discovered, and in August 1797, he was promptly expelled from the Senate.

Blount returned to Tennessee, where he remained popular. He was elected to the state senate and served in this capacity until September 1799. In March of the following year, William Blount complained of a chill and died after a six-day illness. He is buried at the First Presbyterian Church in Knoxville.

Source: Toomey, Michael. "William Blount." *North Carolina History Project*. John Locke Foundation, 2014. Web. 26 June 2014.  
<<http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/commentary/126/entry>>

# William Blount, the Southwest Territory, and Tennessee Statehood

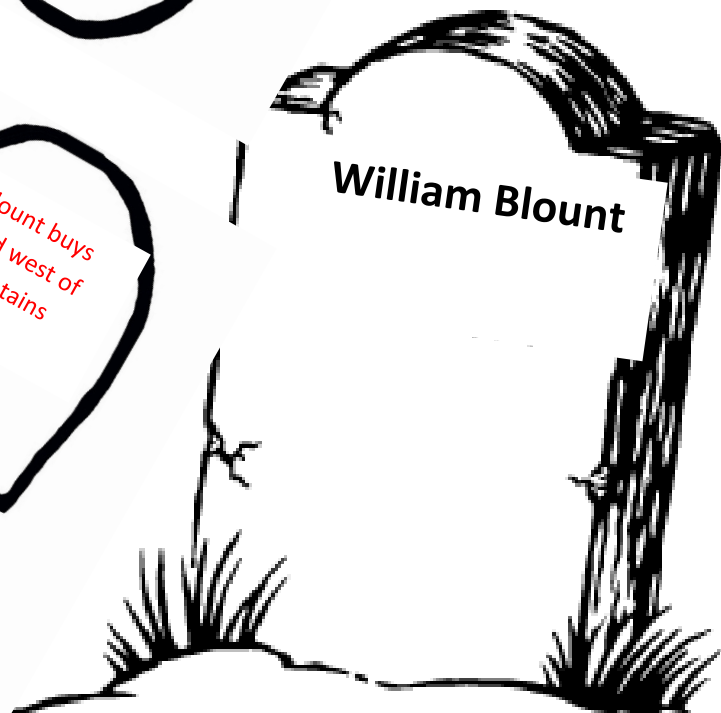
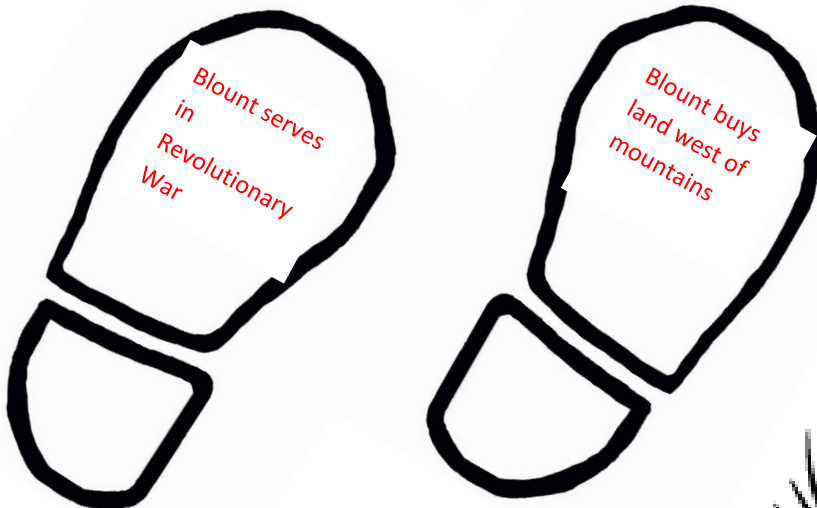
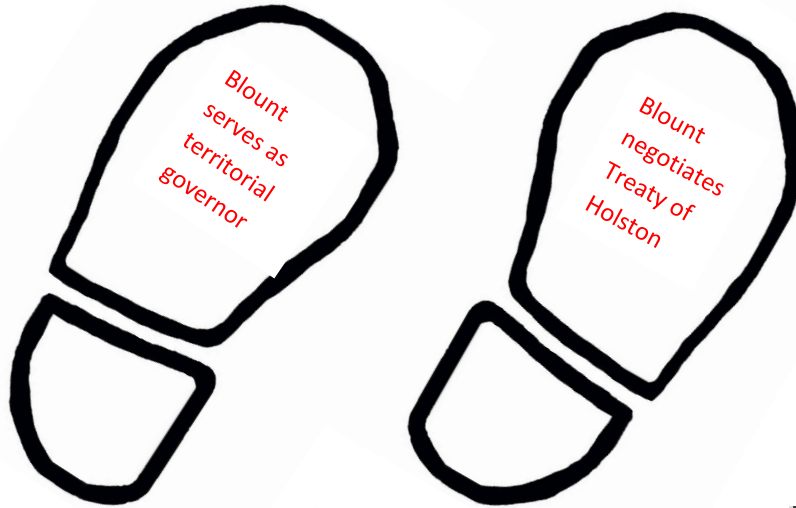
*Follow in William Blount's footsteps as he helps Tennessee become a state. List the 5 events from the essay that you think were most important. Then write a short epitaph for William Blount's gravestone. An epitaph is a short statement in memory of a person who has died*



# William Blount, the Southwest Territory, and Tennessee Statehood Key

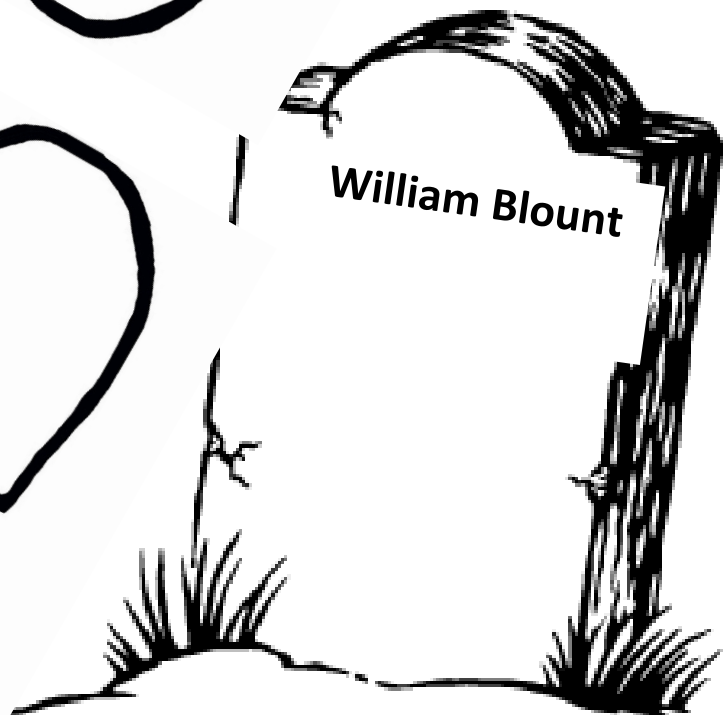
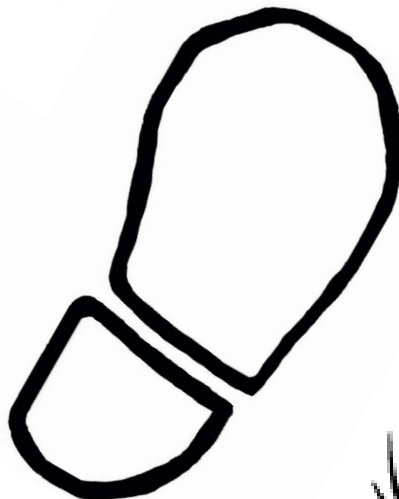
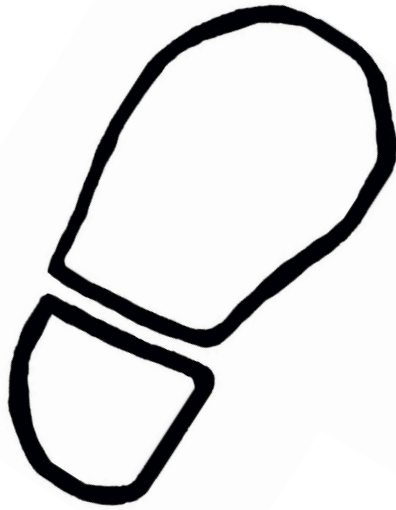
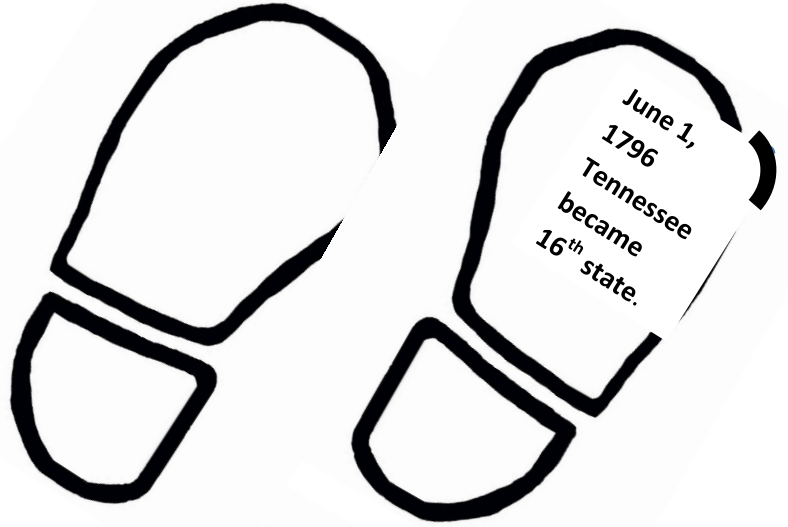
Follow in William Blount's footsteps as he helps Tennessee become a state. List the 5 events from the essay that you think were most important. Then write a short epitaph for William Blount's gravestone. An epitaph is a short statement in memory of a person who has died.

*Answers will vary.*



# William Blount, the Southwest Territory, and Tennessee Statehood

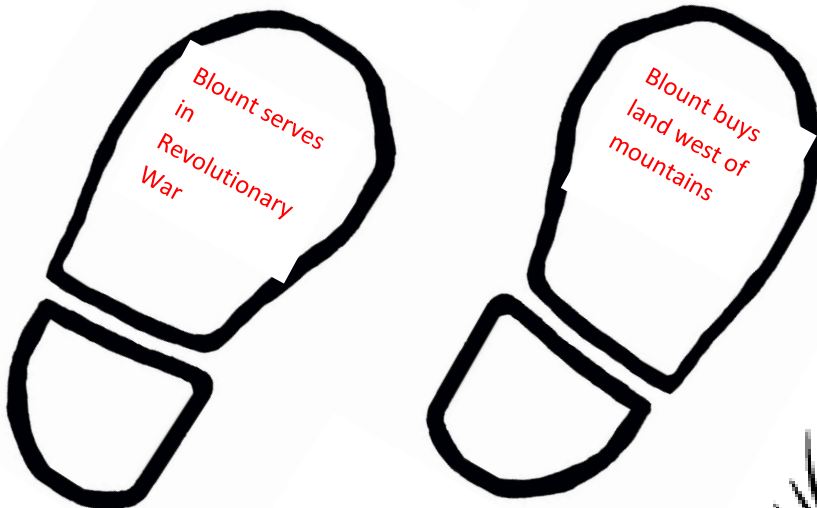
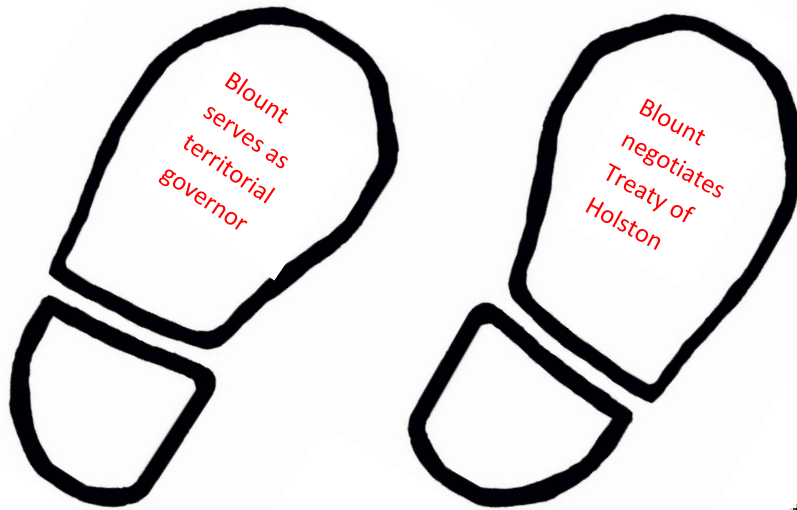
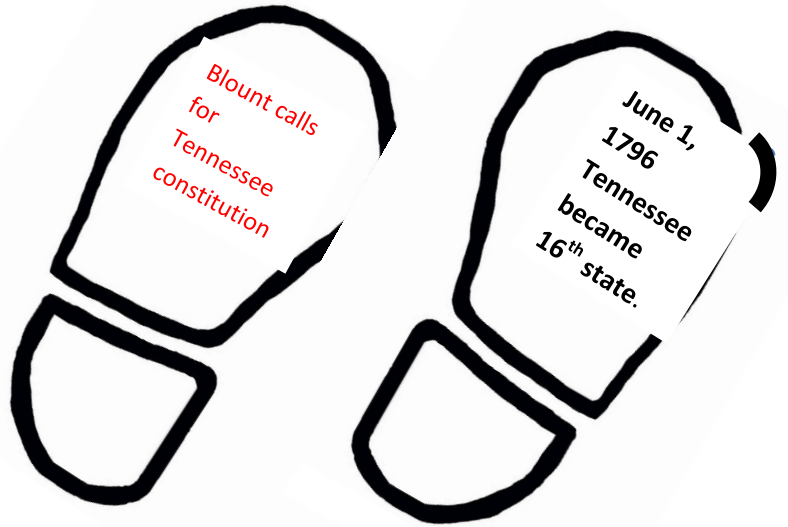
*Follow in William Blount's footsteps as he helps Tennessee become a state. List the 5 events from the essay that you think were most important in chronological order. Then write a 4 line epitaph for William Blount's gravestone. An epitaph is a short statement in memory of a person who has died.*



# William Blount, the Southwest Territory, and Tennessee Statehood Key

Follow in William Blount's footsteps as he helps Tennessee become a state. List the 5 events from the essay that you think were most important in chronological order. Then write a 4 line epitaph for William Blount's gravestone. An epitaph is a short statement in memory of a person who has died.

*Answers will vary.*



# Governor John Sevier's First Address to the General Assembly

Transcribed by Daniel Smith

*Standards: 4.34, 8.39*

*Often called the "Father of Tennessee, John Sevier was born in Virginia in 1745, he eventually moved to Washington County, TN and became Tennessee's first governor. He became a hero after he led an army of settlers at the Battle of Kings Mountain. In his first address to the General Assembly, Sevier informs them that Tennessee has been admitted to the Union, but will have one less representative than previously thought.*

Knoxville 30<sup>th</sup> July

1796 Gentlemen of the Senate and of the House of Representatives.

The Short time in which I conceived it was necessarily my duty to convene the Legislature, compelled me to call you together on so short a notice: In the first instance, it was necessary to give all the time the emergency of the occasion would admit of, and in the second from a circumstance, that the election to be held for Representatives was approaching so near at hand, made it necessary as I conceived for the Assembly to have it in their power, by a timely meeting should they in their wisdom deem it proper, to make an alteration in the act directing the mode of electing Representatives to represent this State in the Congress of the United States, before the day of election should arrive as directed in the aforesaid Act, otherwise it might be attended with disputes and contentions of a disagreeable nature, for by a late act congress the intended number of our Representatives is diminished, of course it proportionally lessens our number of electors for President and Vice President of the United States; Thus such derangement will necessarily require an alteration in our acts passed for such purposes.

Our Senators not being recognized in the Senate of the United States, is another matter for your consideration and attention, and for your more ample information, the several acts and communications accompanying this address, will elucidate unto you, the propriety of my calling the Assembly together at this time.

I hope I may be permitted to observe, that it is of importance and conducive to public happiness to arrange our public acts conformably with those of Congress, so far as they shall respect this State.

The foregoing are the reasons, why I have thought proper to convene the Assembly in Session on the present day. and I make no doubt you will, through your paternal care, wisdom and patriotic deliberations adopt such measures as will tend to promote



the public interest and general utility of the State.

I have the pleasure of announcing to you Gentlemen the admission of the State of Tennessee into the general union, a circumstance, pregnant with every flattering prospect, of peace, happiness and opulence to our infant State: The period is at length arrived, when the people of the Southwestern Territory may enjoy all the blessings and liberties of a free and independent republic.

Permit me to wish your public domestic and individual happiness, while I have the honor to be

Very respectfully  
Your devoted obedient Serv<sup>t</sup>

(signed) John Sevier

Source: "Governor John Sevier's First Address to the General Assembly Transcribed by Daniel Smith." *Tennessee Founding and Landmark Documents*. Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 26 June 2014.  
< <http://tsla.tnsosfiles.com/digital/teva/transcripts/33678.pdf> >

Note: TSLA also has a digital image of this document.

# Letter to Governor Sevier from William Blount and William Cocke

*Standards: 4.45, 8.39*

*William Blount and William Cocke were selected to represent Tennessee in its bid for statehood. This letter informs Governor Sevier that Tennessee will receive fewer electors than expected and the political reasons behind the change.*

Philad.<sup>a</sup> June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1796

Sir

We have the honor to in close you herewith a printed Copy of the proceedings of the Congress respecting the State of Tennessee whereby your Excellency will be informed of the necessity of convening the Legislature by Proclamation at an early day for revising the law respecting the Election of Representatives to Congress and to elect Senators.

It is generally believed that the State of Tennessee would have experienced no difficulty in the admission of her Senators if it had not been understood that George Washington would not again accept the Presidency and that that State would throw its weight into the Southern Scale against Mr. Adams whom it seems the northern People mean to run at the approaching Election.

The Legislature will also have to take measures for lessening the Number of Electors for President and Vice President as we are told four have been appointed and the State can have but three

We have the honor to be very respectfully

Your Excellencys

most obedient servants

W<sup>m</sup>. Blount

W<sup>m</sup>. Cocke

His Excellency  
John Sevier Esq<sup>r</sup>  
Gov<sup>r</sup>n & over the State  
of Tennessee

Source: "Letter to Governor John Sevier from William Blount and William Cocke." *Tennessee Founding and Landmark Documents*. Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 26 June 2014. <[http://www.tn.gov/tsla/founding\\_docs/33676\\_Transcript.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/tsla/founding_docs/33676_Transcript.pdf)>

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